



TOWN OF BERWYN HEIGHTS

Prince George's County, Maryland

Incorporated in 1896 ~ Sixth Oldest Municipality in PG County

TOWN MEETING MINUTES MARCH 11, 2015

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 p.m. Present were Mayor Cheye Calvo, Mayor Pro Tem (MPT) Jodie Kulpa-Eddy, CMs Patricia Dennison, Chris Rasmussen, Anthony Schreiber. Also present were Town Administrator (TA) Jessica Cowles, Chief of Police Kenneth Antolik, Detective Dan Unger, Officers Moroney, Krouse, Ramirez, Police Clerk Iris Cruz, Clerk Kerstin Harper, and citizens.

Mayor Calvo led the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. SWEARING-IN

Mayor Calvo swore in Police Officer Yomyra Ramirez. Chief Antolik said that Ms. Ramirez is a native of New York City and came to Prince George's County in 2011. She is a recent graduate of the Police Academy, placing 6th in her class. She will be the first Latina serving in the Berwyn Heights Police Department and bring needed Spanish speaking abilities to the job. He welcomed her to Berwyn Heights.

Ms. Ramirez thanked the Town for giving her the opportunity to serve. She will think of this community as a second family and looks forward to meeting the residents. Mayor Calvo said that Officer Ramirez is the first officer he swore in, who just graduated from the Police Academy, who is a mother and a Spanish speaker. He said she will bring a new dimension to the Police Department. Ms. Ramirez then introduced her family.

2. INTRODUCTION

Chief Antolik introduced Police Clerk Iris Cruz. She most recently served as a courtroom clerk in the Montgomery County District Court assisting judges with court proceedings. A native of El Salvador, she came to the Washington D.C. area at a young age and graduated with honors from the Stanford Brown College in 2011. She is currently working in Criminal Justice. He is confident that Ms. Cruz brings integrity and professionalism to the job and will be a good fit for the Town.

Ms. Cruz said she is excited to be here and make this community her second family. Mayor Calvo said that he is pleased to add two professional women to the department, both of them Spanish speakers. The Town has looked for Spanish speakers for some time to be able to better engage the considerable number of Spanish speaking residents. He is sure the impact on the police staff will be positive, and is happy to see a number of them having turned out for this occasion, including Sergeant Moroney.

3. MINUTES

Clerk Harper read a summary of the February Town meeting minutes. On a motion by CM Dennison and second by CM Rasmussen, the minutes were approved 5 to 0.

4. TREASURER'S REPORT

TA Cowles gave the Treasurer's report for the month of February as Treasurer Lape was absent.

5. MAYOR'S REPORT

Mayor Calvo said that the budget process has officially started and the Council is reviewing the first budget proposed by TA Cowles. The Council appreciates her taking over the process inherited from her predecessor. This is another tight budget due to continued lagging residential real property tax revenues, the principal revenue source. Overall, revenues went up a little due to a 1% increase in commercial property tax receipts and a significant increase of 7%, or \$30,000, in income tax receipts. In addition, there were savings from staff turnover, moderate insurance rate increases and lower pension contributions. As in the last two years, \$50,000 will be transferred from surplus. Based on these revenues, it is proposed to maintain the current tax rate of 50 cents per \$100 of assessed real property value, plus a 3 cents road tax to support an FY 2016 operating budget of \$2,588,000.

On the expenditure side, the budget is flat. The main changes are in the capital budget. The Council authorized the purchase of a new 27 cubic foot trash truck, costing \$182,000, to be financed from the vehicle replacement reserve to support the consolidation of the second weekly trash collection on Thursdays, which is expected to yield long-term efficiencies. Overall capital expenditures are down, as the sidewalks project will have concluded. However, consideration will be given to renovations in conjunction with the WSSC water main replacement project. With the infrastructure reserve having reached \$700,000, a major road repair project is within reach. To prepare the Council will likely commission the engineering of a road project in the coming fiscal year.

The Council is also planning to spend money on consultants to help with marketing Berwyn Heights and developing a vision for the commercial district along Route 1. Efforts to improve amenities in Town with targeted investments are ongoing. For FY 2016, renovating the batting cage at Sports Park, adding play equipment for children at the elementary school, constructing a dog park, improving bikeways, and purchasing new radios for the Neighborhood Watch are on the agenda.

Mayor Calvo concluded by inviting residents to attend budget meetings and give input on the proposed budget.

6. DEPARTMENT REPORTS

Administration: MPT Kulpa-Eddy gave an overview of the budgeting function of the Administration Department. The budget process starts with the Administrator's submission of a recommended budget for the next fiscal year, which starts on July 1 and runs to June 30 of the following year. The Town is required to have a balanced budget with expenditures matching receipts. Once adopted, the Town Administrator is responsible for managing the budget throughout the year. The Treasurer periodically reports on the financial condition of the Town.

Residents benefit from sound fiscal management in that desired public services are provided with the least amount of tax burden. In the absence of fiscal resources, some cities and towns have gone bankrupt and tax payers are left with having to pay off the debts. Therefore residents are encouraged to be engaged and review the FY 2016 budget, which will be published in the April Bulletin. In addition to the budget, the Administration Department has been busy revising the residential and commercial Clean Lot Ordinances, completing the sidewalks projects and is working on finding the best solution for adding emergency generators.

Code Compliance: CM Rasmussen reported that the search for a new code supervisor is ongoing and that he will meet with TA Cowles next week to review the candidate pool. Thanks go to Charles Hall and all Code staff for stepping up to complete the work of the Code Department. On a personal note, CM Rasmussen's son has a new job located in the D.C. and will no longer have to travel to Minnesota for work-related reasons. He noted that the University of Maryland women's basketball team has finished their season 18 and 0, and will be 1st seed in the upcoming national championships.

CM Rasmussen continued that he will ask his fellow Councilmembers to set aside some money for the urban forest initiative. Many Berwyn Heights' trees are old, diseased and some resources should be invested to care for them or replace them. He hopes the Council will develop a comprehensive plan to manage the urban forest with the help of the Green Team and other interested parties. One piece of the plan would be to educate residents about tree care and grants available to plant and grow new trees. Another to train Public Works staff to diagnose tree problems and perform some basic tree maintenance.

Mayor Calvo offered CM Rasmussen the opportunity to read the Arbor Day Proclamation on Berwyn Heights Day, which was gladly accepted.

Parks and Recreation, Education and Civic Affairs: CM Dennison said she is looking forward to putting together the next budget, and that she has learned a

deal about the budget since she was first elected to the Council in 2002. She then announced upcoming events.

Public Health and Safety: Mayor Calvo noted that the Council will have CP Johnson Engineers at the next worksession to discuss the priority 1 sidewalks and some final decisions on difficult locations. Anyone interested in the sidewalks project might want to attend.

Chief Antolik gave the police activities report for February. There were 6 Part I offenses, versus the 5 year average of 5.4, and 12 for the year to date, which is with the 5 year average of 12. During the snow, police were lenient with issuing parking tickets and consequently the infractions cited were lower than normal total of 118. Speed camera tickets came to 173, all issued on Greenbelt Road. On February 20, Berwyn Heights police responded to a robbery at the Suntrust Bank suspect escaped with an undetermined amount of cash but was later arrested in Baltimore in connection with another bank robbery.

CM Rasmussen asked what the speed limit on Edmonston Road is. Signs posted say 20 mph, while the pavement has a 25 mph limit. Chief Antolik said that Works has attempted to cover the pavement markings but the reflective paint still shines through. Mayor Calvo clarified that the 20 mph speed limit applies between 7 a.m. and 6 p.m. when school is in session, otherwise it is 25 mph. CM Rasmussen also asked what a house check is. He was informed that Berwyn Heights is one of a few Maryland municipalities that will monitor residents' properties upon request when they are on vacation or out of Town for a longer period.

Mayor Calvo said that he noticed many drivers talking on the phone when he was checking out the sidewalks at Pop's Park. He asked if the police issue many citations for this offense. Chief Antolik said that they do issue citations for this but list it under miscellaneous infractions. He will talk with Sergeant Moroney to focus attention on this problem.

Public Works: CM Schreiber said that he and his wife had a baby boy on March 3. He will wait to disclose his name until an official naming ceremony has taken place. He has not had a chance to meet with Director Lockley this week, but knows that they were busy with snow clearing operations. With exception of a minor collision they did a good job keeping the streets passable.

Mayor Calvo added that he appreciates Public Works employees collecting trash and clearing snow during this year's harsh winter. Director Lockley had some difficulty finding road salt lately because all salt storage facilities are empty.

7. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Green Team: Mayor Calvo reported that the Green Team had to cancel a couple of their events because of snow and will be rescheduled. Residents can find out on the Green Team Facebook page. Community garden plots are in the process of being rented for the new season.

Neighborhood Watch/Emergency Preparedness: Mike Attick reported that the NW/EP will hold an active shooter training session to help citizens be better prepared if they are caught in such a situation. On March 21, a First Aid class will be offered in Landover Hills. On April 19, an emergency response training will take place at Greenbelt Metro Station, and on April 24, the NW/EP will hold its 2nd annual Wine Tasting event. All through spring and summer, there will be many volunteer opportunities relating to emergency preparedness. Students can earn community service hours.

8. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Ordinance 107 - Adoption of Clean Lot Ordinance Amendments: Clerk Harper read the adopting language of the Ordinance. CM Dennison moved to introduce MPT Kulpa-Eddy seconded. Mayor Calvo explained that the Clean Lot Ordinance is an Ordinance that affects every home owner in Berwyn Heights to varying degrees. The Council's revisions have streamlined language and organization of the Ordinance and tightened regulations to focus on key problems. These include:

- Shorter compliance periods for repeat offenders and multiple repeat offenders;
- Clear categories of enforcement. Categories were added for immediate hazards that must be remedied immediately upon receipt of notice (e.g. unsafe storage of flammable materials), and for unsafe accessory structures that may require more time to be fixed.
- Stricter regulation of bamboo and other invasive plants. Home owners who plant bamboo must now maintain a 2 foot buffer inside their property line to prevent it from spreading to neighboring properties.

CM Rasmussen proposed a change in wording to Section 6 E (1) replacing 'shall' with 'may' to indicate that an immediate fine may, or may not be issued, subject to code officer's discretion. Mayor Calvo said he thinks that 'shall' is appropriate. It mandates either of two options for enforcing a violation: 1) to impose an immediate fine (as for parking on grass) or 2) giving the property owner 24 hours to comply (as for a first offense) at the discretion of a code officer. He thinks using 'may' gives a code officer unlimited discretion, whereas 'shall' limits discretion to one time. CM Rasmussen said he is comfortable leaving the section as is.

MPT Kulpa-Eddy said she thinks the revised Ordinance is much easier to understand and wants to see how a new code supervisor will administer these regulations. The Ordinance was adopted in a 5 to 0 vote.

Ordinance 134 - Commercial Clean Lot: Mayor Calvo said that this Ordinance needs a little more attention before it can be finalized. CM Dennison moved to propose adoption. CM Schreiber seconded. The motion passed 5 to 0.

9. NEW BUSINESS

There was none.

10. CITIZENS DISCUSSION

Mike Attick, 62nd Avenue, asked for clarifications on the Treasurer's report. Mayor Calvo said the Metroland South Core Fund shows money received to date from developers of the south core. They are placed into a reserve and will total \$1 million when all is paid out. The Public Safety Reserve Fund holds receipts from camera tickets, but the numbers still require adjustment. The Public Safety Taxing District budgets money from a special tax imposed on Berwyn Heights businesses to pay for public safety needs in the commercial district.

Mr. Attick also asked about repairs to the island at the intersection of Pontiac Street and Kenilworth Avenue and an accident in which a Public Works snow plow was involved. Mayor Calvo replied he believes that SHA will come back to repair the island, and that damage to the Public Works truck and plow was minimal. However, the Town may receive an insurance claim for the other vehicle damaged in the accident.

Phil Ventura, 57th Avenue, commented that Public Works employees generally did a good job plowing but are not as experienced as the old crew and have a few things to learn. Further, planting new trees should not be that difficult and could be accomplished by sending out a few men with a pick and a shovel. Lastly, this winter snow and ice was hard on the home owners who have new sidewalks in front of their homes, because snow plows piled snow back on after they had been cleared. Piles then melted and refroze. A regular snow shovel is inadequate to clear ice piles. He was able to offer his motorized equipment to help. The Town may want to consider what effects new sidewalks have on residents under the worst conditions before undertaking such a project.

CM Schreiber noted that the Public Works Department is planning to get special equipment to clear sidewalks now that there are more sidewalks in Town.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:33 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper, Town Clerk*